Visitor Preconceptions
Front-end interviews

Visitor Feedback
Exit surveys

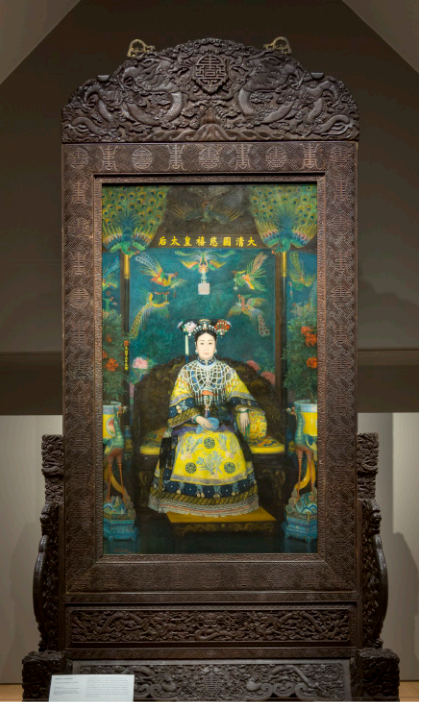
Visitor Behavior
Gallery observations

Visitor Takeaways
Response station

EMPRESSES OF CHINA'S FORBIDDEN CITY

EVALUATION REPORT

PEM
Peabody Essex Museum



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Report design by Colorbox Industries

EXHIBITION OVERVIEW

Empresses of China's Forbidden City was the first exhibition to explore the role of empresses in shaping China's last dynasty—the Qing dynasty—from 1644 to 1912. Nearly 200 spectacular objects from the Palace Museum told the little-known stories of how imperial women influenced court politics, art, and religion. Visitors explored treasures that provided a glimpse into the lives of empresses whose contributions had remained largely silent—until now.

The exhibition was timed to mark the 40th anniversary of the establishment of U.S.-China diplomatic relations and was organized by the Peabody Essex Museum; the Smithsonian's Freer|Sackler, Washington, D.C.; and the Palace Museum, Beijing.

VISITOR GOALS AND OUTCOMES

During exhibition development at the Peabody Essex Museum (PEM), the Exhibition Team crafted the following goals and outcomes to guide and focus the exhibition's interpretation.

Visitors will...

- **FEEL transported from the museum space to the Forbidden City: mysterious, imposing, and grand.**
- **EXPERIENCE moments of powerful connection and empathy through stories about the empresses.**
- **DEVELOP a new or more nuanced understanding of the empresses and their roles and responsibilities in the Forbidden City**
- **QUESTION the challenges that women in roles of power have faced—and continue to face—around the world.**

Team Participants

EVALUATION PLANNERS

Bridget Devlin, *Evaluation and Interpretation Planner*

Cristy Hebert, *Evaluation Associate*

EXHIBIT TEAM PARTICIPANTS

Priscilla Danforth, *Director of Exhibition Planning*

Liz Gardner, *Interpretation Planner*

Gabrielle Niu, *Intern*

Sarah Otto, *Exhibitions Project Manager*

Paula Richter, *Curator for Exhibitions and Research*

Dave Seibert, *Director of Exhibition Design*

Doris Sung, *Assistant Curator for Exhibitions and Research*

Daisy Wang, *The Robert N. Shapiro Curator of Chinese and East Asian Art*

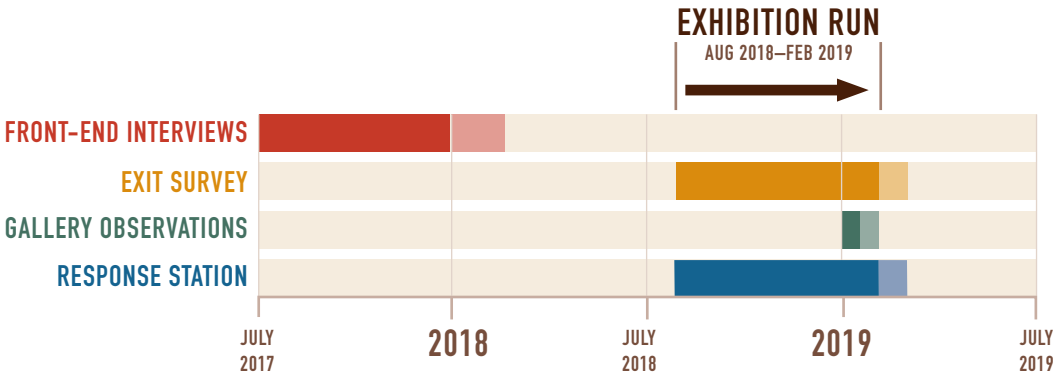
Gloria Zhao, *Intern*

EVALUATION OVERVIEW

Evaluation was integrated into the team's process throughout the development and run of *Empresses of China's Forbidden City*. Early evaluation planning kicked off in Spring 2017 as team members discussed possible evaluation questions and methods that would help to inform the team's interpretive goals and outcomes. These questions considered the attitudes, interests, beliefs, preconceptions and misconceptions that visitors may have about the exhibition's content.

EVALUATION TIMELINE

After the initial planning and piloting, the entire Exhibition Team participated in a front-end study using Personal Meaning Maps. During the run of the exhibition at PEM, the Evaluation Team collected 100 visitor surveys from visitors outside of the gallery exit. In addition, the team observed visitors' use of digital timelines at both the beginning and end of the exhibition. Finally, at the close of the exhibition in Spring 2019, with the help of over fifty staff members, the team carefully analyzed thousands of visitor responses collected at the exhibition's scroll response station.



Darker color indicates data collection and lighter color represents data analysis.

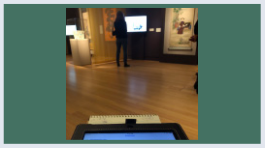
EVALUATION CAPACITY BUILDING

At strategic points throughout data collection and analysis on each of these methods, the entire team was invited to contribute, participate, and, in effect, build capacity for their evaluation practice at PEM.

INTERVIEWS

EXIT SURVEYS

GALLERY OBSERVATIONS



RESPONSE STATION

EXHIBITION RUN
2017 2018 2019 2020

VISITOR PRECONCEPTIONS

FRONT-END INTERVIEWS

In the early stages of exhibition development, the team explored preconceptions and associations with the topic of "Empresses of China" by asking visitors to complete a Personal Meaning Map.

DATA COLLECTION & METHODS

The visitors' responses gathered at the start of the project, on the front-end, meaningfully impacted exhibition development and interpretive strategies

With the assistance and consultation of PEM's Evaluation Team, all members of the Exhibition Team participated in this front-end evaluation to assess visitors' preconceptions and associations with the topic of empresses of China. It is important to note that this was the first front-end evaluation undertaken to date for a full Exhibition Team at the museum. While other teams have participated in summative evaluations, this was the first time full teams were participating in data collection prior to the opening of the exhibition. **The visitors' responses gathered at the start of the project, on the front-end, meaningfully impacted exhibition development and interpretive strategies.**

The team utilized the method of Personal Meaning Mapping (PMM). Team data collectors were trained by evaluation staff in Spring 2017, and then over the course of about seven months, team members interviewed one hundred visitors. Interviews were conducted in the museum's Atrium space. Visitors were recruited using convenience sampling, and asked if they would like to participate. Visitors were then handed a piece of paper with the phrase, "Everything that comes to mind when you see the words..." at the top, and a small circle in the middle that said, "Empresses of China". Once finished, the interviewer asked the visitor to elaborate on some of their responses. At the end, visitors were given a brief demographics form to complete.

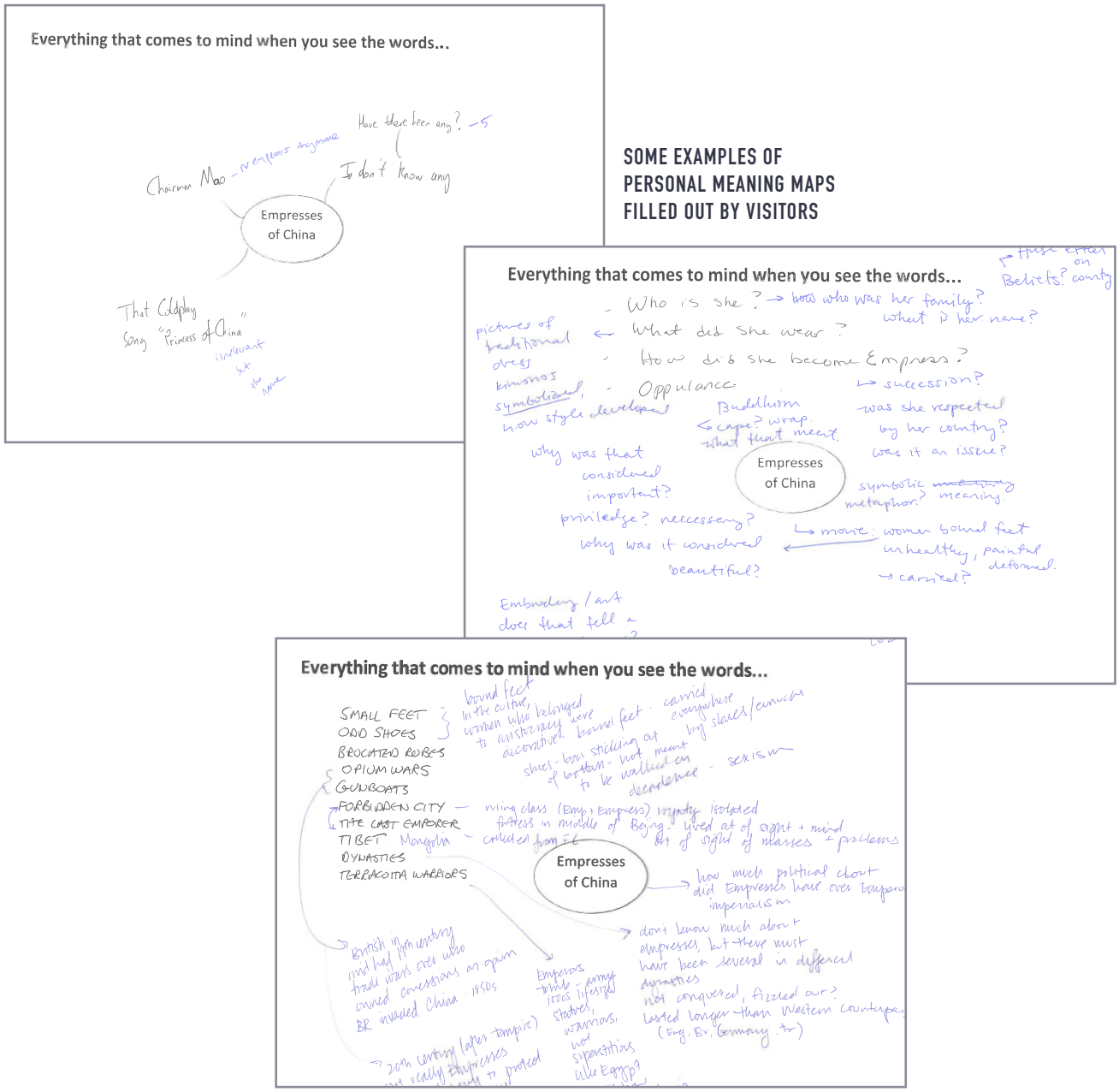
VISITOR PRECONCEPTIONS

EXHIBITION RUN
2017 2018 2019 2020

Personal Meaning Maps allow for a blank space where visitors are free to use words, phrases or even draw their responses. Some visitors use the space to show links between concepts and show a hierarchy of ideas that come to mind.

PERSONAL MEANING MAPS

The Personal Meaning Mapping exercise is similar to a concept map, mind-map or webbing. Visitors would either write in a list or let the responses float around the circle in the middle. Some visitors drew lines to connect their ideas. After the visitor was finished with creating their personal meaning map, the interviewer took the sheet and conducted a brief informal follow-up interview discussing the map responses. In a different color pen, the interviewer took notes using the visitors' exact words, that served to elaborate on their initial responses.


Everything that comes to mind when you see the words...
Empresses of China
Chairman Mao
Have there been any?
I don't know any
That Coldplay Song "Princess of China"
Everything that comes to mind when you see the words...
Empresses of China
Who is she?
What did she wear?
How did she become Empress?
Opulance
Buddhism
Why was that considered important?
Why was it considered beautiful?
Was she respected by her country?
Was it an issue?
Everything that comes to mind when you see the words...
SMALL FEET
ODD SHOES
BROCATED ROBES
OPIUM WARS
GUNBOATS
FORBIDDEN CITY
THE LAST EMPEROR
TIBET
DYNASTIES
TERRACOTTA WARRIORS
Empresses of China
bound feet
sexism
how much political clout did Empresses have over Emperors
don't know much about empresses, but there must have been several in different dynasties

SOME EXAMPLES OF PERSONAL MEANING MAPS FILLED OUT BY VISITORS

EXAMPLE RESPONSES

EMPRESSES
WOMEN AND POWER (62)

Sheltered not a lot of freedom, contained in their role, how to act, what to wear, where to be seen

Power she was just a bobble? Then, she would have been restricted with no control

What did they achieve? Were they limited by society? Did they have autonomy and some might have helped with the power behind? e.g. Eva Peron Argentinian, Palace intrigue

Politics what's going on in the world how it relates to Empresses, -daily lives, feminism, What they could do, What they couldn't do, communication- who?, Families-how, culture + people

MATERIAL CULTURE
CLOTHING (82)

Asian inspired costume design, colors, fabrics, social status, women, graphics from shoes, Chinese foot binding, jewelry-gamut of jade and beyond

Fabrics I'm a quilter. Clothes, furniture, stories that fabrics tell.

Silk whatever they're wearing, wasn't there a Silk Road, was that China or Japan?

Colours complimentary colors creating conflict & interesting details, surroundings and clothing, bright & intense,

CHINA
GENERAL (52)

Mystery mysterious country, oldest culture, foreign to our culture, the culture itself what was it like?

The Great Wall China, amazes me, what they've done, purpose, generations built the wall

Mulan? Empress or Warrior?

FINDINGS & DATA ANALYSIS

In follow up to the evaluation team collecting 100 visitor exercises/interviews, the team met to focus specifically on digesting the interview responses.

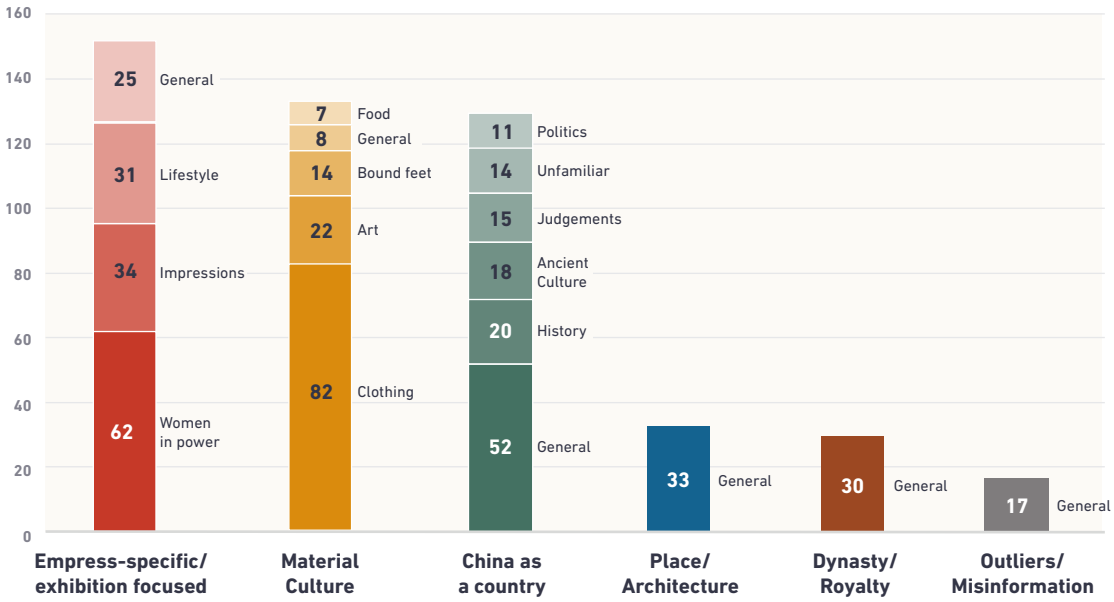
Interviews were conducted on varied days of the week in Summer and Fall 2017. In total, the team interviewed 100 visitors. Participants ranged in age from 18 to 65. 56% of visitors interviewed were female, 41% were male, and 3% elected not to answer. Over a third were visiting the museum for the first time (33%), and 18% were members of the museum. The majority of visitors were from the northeast U.S., with 10 visiting from other U.S. states, and 6 visiting from other countries.

Each Personal Meaning Map collected contained multiple words or phrases, resulting in 474 individual responses to explore and analyze. With this large dataset cleaned and entered into an excel spreadsheet, each individual response was then printed on a separate card. Members of the Empresses Exhibition Team were invited to digest and sort all of these responses together in a 2-hour long workshop facilitated by the Evaluation Team.

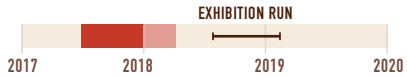
In this workshop, each team member was given a small envelope of approximately 40 cards. After first reading and sorting this small set of cards on their own, team members then shared their findings with the person next to them. Then, the entire team began to discuss overlapping and emerging themes, and proceeded to work together to identify and sort all cards into six main categories: 1) Empresses-specific/ exhibition focused, 2) Material Culture, 3) China as a country, 4) Place/architecture, 5) Dynasty/royalty, and 6) Outliers or misinformation. Each main category was then sorted further into sub-categories and counted. For example, the team discovered that 14 responses related specifically to the topic of "Bound Feet", and 62 responses discussed "Women in Power".

Visitor Responses

Number of visitors who mentioned these topics (n=474)

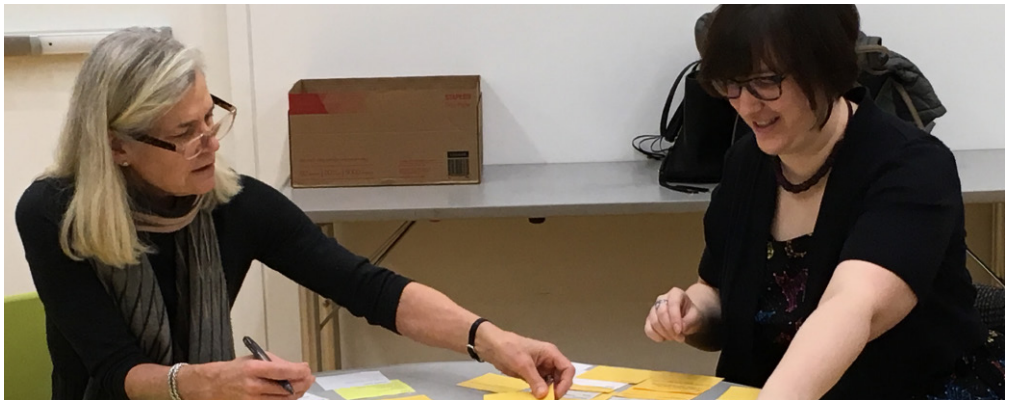


VISITOR PRECONCEPTIONS



EVALUATION CAPACITY BUILDING

The two-hour workshop not only enabled the team to efficiently analyze the data, it provided a space for the team to reflect on their experience doing the data collection, practice qualitative data coding, and discuss how the findings might inform interpretation strategies moving forward. Together, the team made meaning of the data and uncovered areas where the exhibition would need to "build bridges" to the content for visitors.



This exercise revealed not only the topics that ***most interested*** our visitors (how did Empresses live? where did they go? what kind of power did they yield?), but it also demonstrated areas where visitors ***had assumptions or misconceptions*** about Chinese culture and history (bound feet, misinformation/association—Geishas, Japan, etc.).

Reflecting on these results, the Exhibition Team identified a need to contextualize the exhibition content both geographically and historically for an audience interested in, but less familiar with, Chinese history.

VISITOR IMPRESSIONS
EXIT SURVEYS

During the run of the exhibition, the Evaluation Team surveyed visitors as they exited *Empresses of China's Forbidden City*. Exit surveys included a combination of closed-ended and open-ended questions pertaining to the visitor's overall experience.

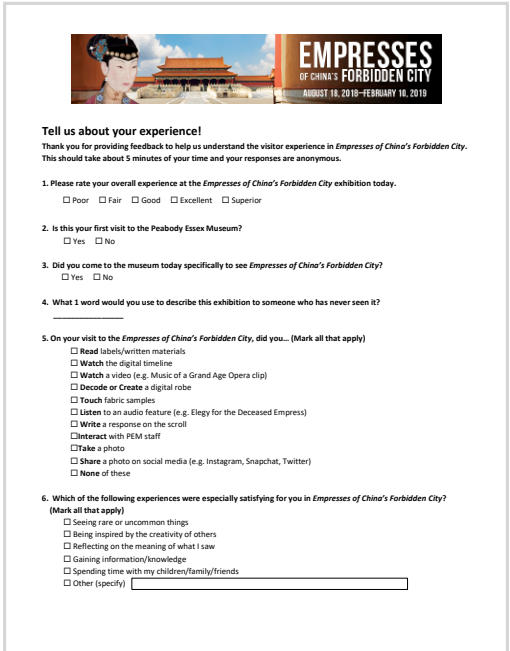
DATA COLLECTION & METHODS

Surveys were designed and built using SurveyGizmo.

The exit survey was devised by the Evaluation Team in collaboration with the Exhibition Team. Surveys were designed and built using SurveyGizmo. Among the questions posed, the survey asked visitors to rate their overall experience, describe the exhibition in one word, self report on what they did in the exhibition (i.e. Read written materials), and what they found most satisfying. The survey also had a section dedicated to the collection of visitor demographic data including reported age, gender, ethnicity, group type, and zip code.

Surveys were collected on iPads over the course of four weeks from October to December 2018. Of the 10.5 hours of data collection, five were on weekdays, and five and half hours were on weekends. In addition, half were morning sessions and the other half were afternoon sessions.

Data collectors were posted outside the exit of the exhibition, approaching every third or fifth visitor on busy days, and every single visitor on slow days. The response rate was 86%, with 14% of visitors opting not to participate. Refusals cited reasons such as parking expiration, lack of interest in a survey or lunch appointment.


EMPRESSES OF CHINA'S FORBIDDEN CITY
AUGUST 18, 2018–FEBRUARY 10, 2019

Tell us about your experience!

Thank you for providing feedback to help us understand the visitor experience in *Empresses of China's Forbidden City*. This should take about 5 minutes of your time and your responses are anonymous.

1. Please rate your overall experience at the *Empresses of China's Forbidden City* exhibition today.
☐ Poor ☐ Fair ☐ Good ☐ Excellent ☐ Superior

2. Is this your first visit to the Peabody Essex Museum?
☐ Yes ☐ No

3. Did you come to the museum today specifically to see *Empresses of China's Forbidden City*?
☐ Yes ☐ No

4. What 1 word would you use to describe this exhibition to someone who has never seen it?
_____

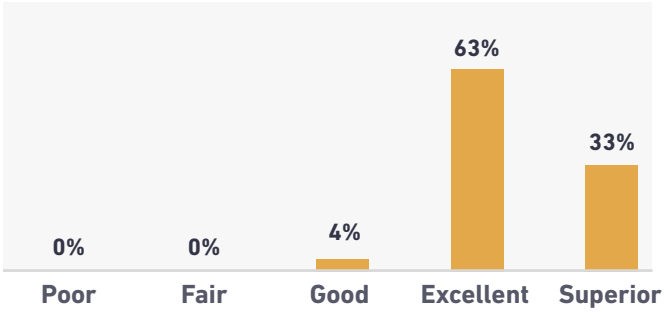
5. On your visit to the *Empresses of China's Forbidden City*, did you... (Mark all that apply)
☐ **Read** labels/written materials
☐ **Watch** the digital timeline
☐ **Watch** a video (e.g. Music of a Grand Age Opera clip)
☐ **Decode or Create** a digital robe
☐ **Touch** fabric samples
☐ **Listen** to an audio feature (e.g. Elegy for the Deceased Empress)
☐ **Write** a response on the scroll
☐**Interact** with PEM staff
☐**Take** a photo
☐ **Share** a photo on social media (e.g. Instagram, Snapchat, Twitter)
☐ **None** of these

6. Which of the following experiences were especially satisfying for you in *Empresses of China's Forbidden City*? (Mark all that apply)
☐ Seeing rare or uncommon things
☐ Being inspired by the creativity of others
☐ Reflecting on the meaning of what I saw
☐ Gaining information/knowledge
☐ Spending time with my children/family/friends
☐ Other (specify) _____

FINDINGS & DATA ANALYSIS

In total, the Evaluation Team collected 100 surveys over the run of the exhibition. These 100 visitors reflect a random sample of the overall visitation. Of the visitors surveyed, 59% were female, 38% were male, and 3% marked other or preferred not to respond. The majority of respondents were repeat visitors to PEM (n=76), were non-members (n=82), and came specifically to see the exhibition (n= 71). When asked what word they would use to describe the exhibition to someone who has never seen it before, the top three words were "Beautiful" (n=9), "Interestings (n=8), and Intriguing (n=5). "Unique" and "Sumptuous" were the next most popular words used to describe the exhibition. All but one visitor reported reading the labels or written materials, and the majority reported watching one or more of the videos in the exhibition. Approximately half of the visitors surveyed noted that they participated in the tactile fabric interactive (n=51), 44% listened to the audio feature, and 48% interacted with PEM staff.

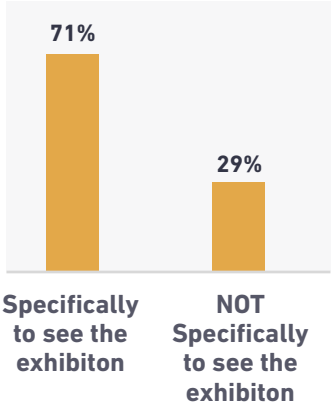
Overall Experience Rating (OER)

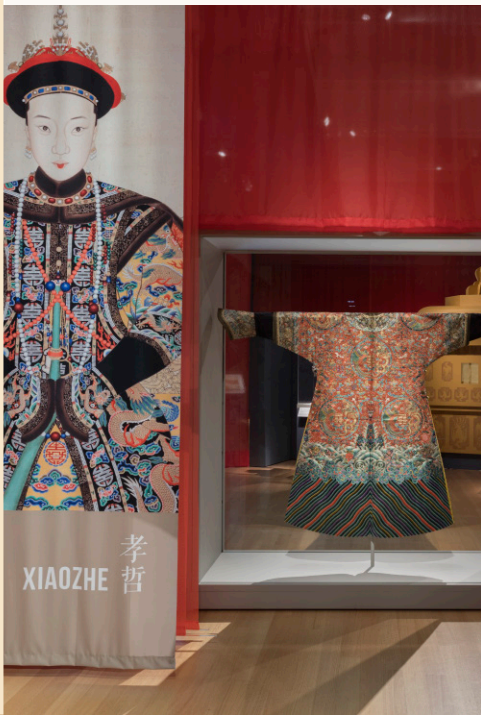


96% of visitors surveyed rated their overall experience in this exhibition as *Excellent* (n= 63) or *Superior* (n=33). Only four visitors described it as *Good*, and no one surveyed described it as *Fair* or *Poor.*

Visitors coming specifically to see *Empresses of China's Forbidden City*

The majority of visitors reported coming to the museum specifically to see *Empresses*.





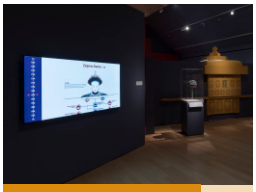
FINDINGS & DATA ANALYSIS, CONT.

What visitors did in the exhibition (mark all that apply)

Read labels/written materials

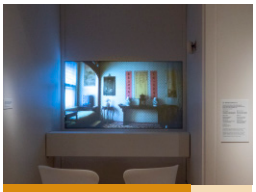
99%

Watch the digital timeline



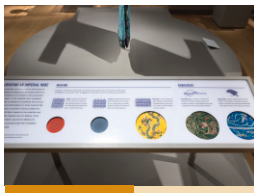
66%

Watch a video



63%

Touch fabric samples

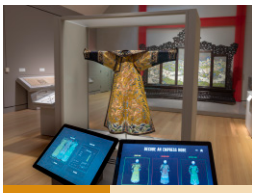


51%

Interact with PEM staff

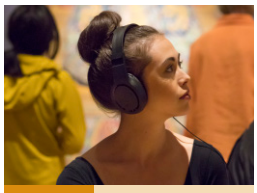
48%

Decode or Create a Digital Robe



43%

Listen to an audio feature

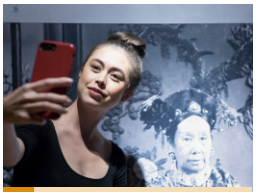


35%

Write a response on the scroll

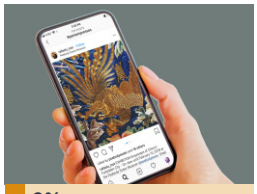
27%

Take a photo



10%

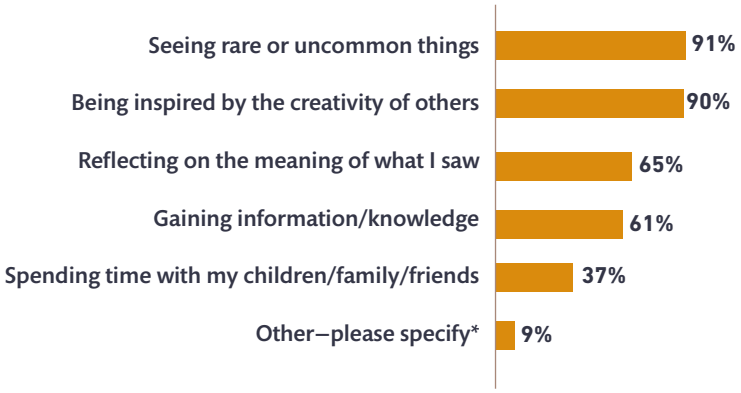
Share a photo on social media



8%

FINDINGS & DATA ANALYSIS, CONT.

Which of the following experiences were especially satisfying for you in *Empresses of China's Forbidden City*? (mark all that apply)



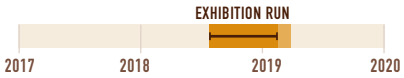
The majority of visitors marked "Seeing rare or uncommon things" (n=91) and "Being inspired by the creativity of others" (n=90) as especially satisfying experiences in the exhibition.

Top words visitors used to describe this exhibition

to someone who has never seen it

TOP WORDS MENTIONED

Beautiful (9)
Interesting (8)
Intriguing (5)
Unique (4)
Sumptuous (4)
Inspiring (3)
Impressive (3)
Excellent (3)
Amazing (3)
Informative (2)
Great (2)
Fascinating (2)
Fantastic (2)
Extraordinary (2)
Colorful (2)



FINDINGS & DATA ANALYSIS, CONT.

"Before my visit to *Empresses of China's Forbidden City*, I hadn't realized that..."

EXAMPLES OF EACH CATEGORY

Women/Power (n=16)

Women were so influential in China, especially during the Qing dynasty

Women had so much power behind the scenes

The empresses were also powerful/ influential

Roles of Women (n=11)

The role of the empresses was so important

Women played such an important political role in Chinese politics so long ago

Chinese culture/ history (n=9)

Buddhist culture played such a significant role in the Chinese imperial court.

That the Qing dynasty lasted so long

Process of Becoming an Empress (n=9)

The process of choosing an heir was such a contentious and competitive one. That there was ever a ruling empress of China

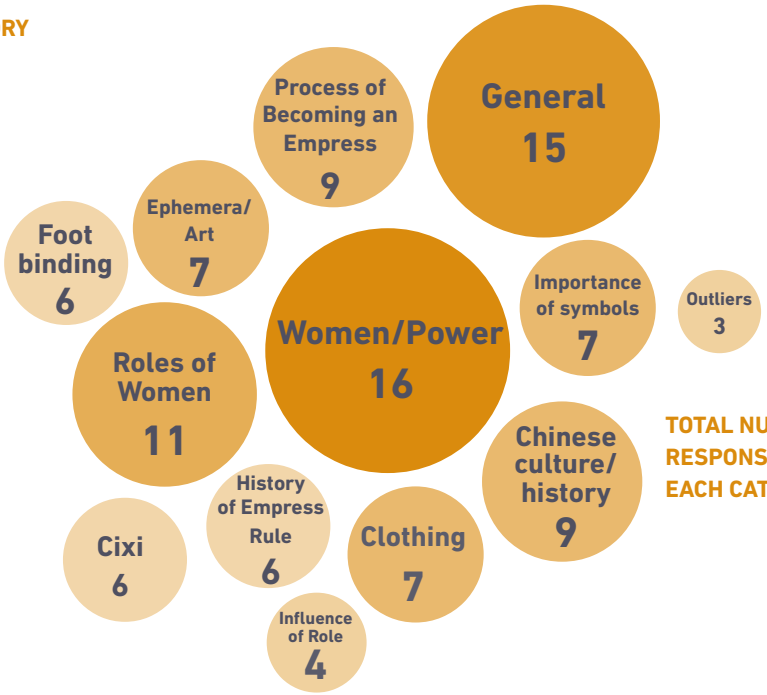
You could never see your family ever again.

Empresses were so young.

Importance of Symbols (n=7)

Phoenixes and bats were important symbols for the Chinese ruling family

Yellow was the color of the emperor



TOTAL NUMBER OF RESPONSES WITHIN EACH CATEGORY

Clothing (n=7)

The detail of the robes was so extensive

Bright yellow was only worn by nobility

Empresses have amazing robes

Ephemera/Art (n=7)

Empresses did not personally own their treasures, to name one.

Many of the precious personal effects of the empress and court ladies were not preserved after their demise, but were recycled or melted down and returned to the imperial warehouses.

Cixi (n=6)

The empress Cixi was a political activist or that she existed at all.

An empress dowager ruled for over 50 years

History of Empress Rule (n=6)

That there had been an empress who ruled for so long

Foot binding (n=6)

Not all women had bound feet

Empresses didn't have to bind their feet.

That empresses were allowed to be active and didn't have bound feet.

General—new information (n=15)

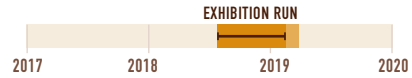
There were Chinese empresses... I didn't know anything about this topic.

How many empresses there were

I didn't know anything about Chinese history

I knew so little about some things and I'm Chinese!

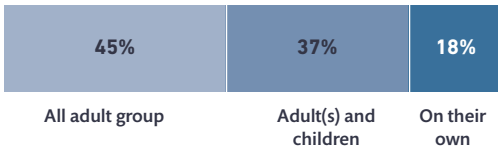
These women existed. I admit being largely ignorant of Chinese history before the opium wars. Thanks for helping to change that.



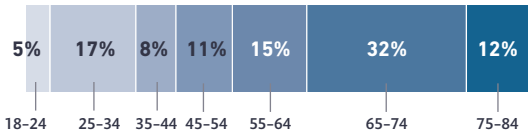
DEMOGRAPHICS

Of the visitors who filled out the exit survey (n= 100)

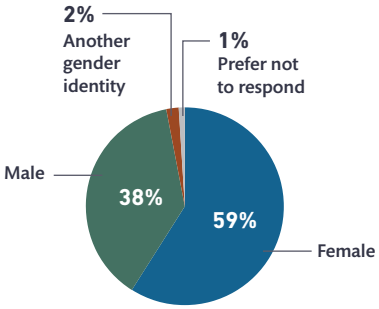
Group composition (age)



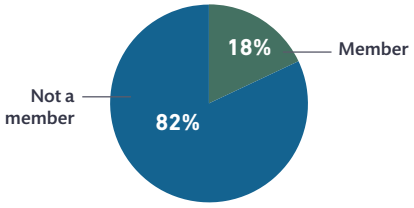
Age of respondent



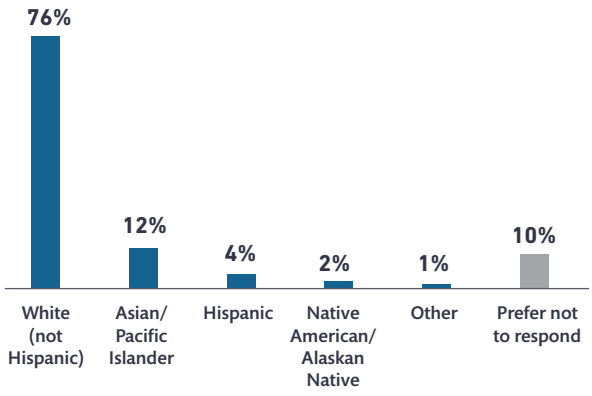
Gender of respondent

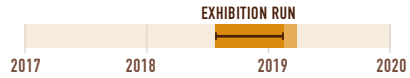


Membership status



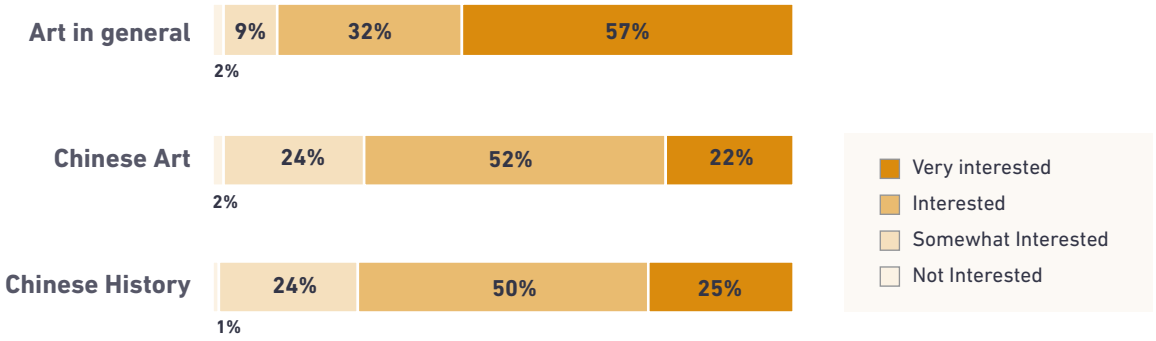
Race/ethnicity (mark all that apply)





DEMOGRAPHICS, CONT.

Interest in art



Other Comments

Every exit survey ends with the open-ended question, "Is there anything else you would like to tell us about your experience today?" This question allows visitors to address anything, from concerns to compliments, that they were not otherwise able to cover in the rest of the survey. Many of the responses to this particular question help to inform our teams on the overall visitor experience and often highlight opportunities for improvements or enhancements, whether it be to lighting, legibility or content. Below are some examples along with the total number of comments that we received in each category for this exhibition.

Positive—Exhibition (n=20)

I loved being transported by this beauty. Well done, beautifully displayed.

I've lived in mainland China and still felt awed and informed. I am spellbound that these artifacts remain intact!

I learned things that I did not know previously.

PEM (n=8)

Gallery guides were awesome

My husband and I just love the museum and come to see specific exhibits. We always leave exhilarated and with new knowledge. Thank you for all you do!

As a docent at the Newark Museum I am in awe of what PEM accomplishes.

Design/Curation (n=6)

It seemed counterintuitive that the empresses weren't strictly chronological in order of appearance. Truly amazing exhibit though. I feel extremely grateful that you all were able to assemble this

Reporting of historical info wonderfully done enriches the museum. Very long. Children would have a hard time. More information still desired. Things still seemed incomplete.

I wish some of the lighting was brighter/ placed differently. It was difficult to see some of the amazing detail in the display cases.

While the exhibition was still open to the public, the Exhibition Team communicated interest in evaluating how two different digital timelines were being utilized in the galleries. The team was interested in exploring to what extent visitor behavior and attention changed from the beginning of the exhibition to the end.

BACKGROUND

Based on the results of the Personal Meaning Mapping front-end evaluation, the Exhibition Team created two digital timelines, one at the entry, and one in the final section, to provide quick and concise historical context. The entry timeline oriented visitors to China, the Qing Dynasty, and the empresses featured in the exhibition. The second timeline focused specifically on the rule of Empress Cixi in the 19th century. In particular, the Exhibition Team was curious if visitors' dwell times differed from the beginning of the exhibition experience to the end. Over the course of 12 hours of gallery observation, the Evaluation Team timed how long visitors stopped at each timeline device and conducted a separate "stop/no stop" tally at each timeline to give a general snapshot of overall use.

Empress Xiaoxian 1712–1748
1736
1736–1795
China reaches its peak as one of the most advanced countries in the world and benefits from flourishing international commerce.

SCREENSHOT OF THE ENTRY DIGITAL TIMELINE

The observation instrument was specifically geared towards marking the beginning and end points in seconds of a visitors' engagement with the timeline. Observations also recorded crowd levels, group size, and observed age and gender.

DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

To collect data on visitor engagement with both timelines, the team used a digital application called TracknTime™. TrackNTime™ is tablet software designed for tracking and timing research, especially in a museum setting. It provides evaluators with the capability to design timing and tracking instruments customized to the gallery being studied, to download exhibition and element information, and to easily export data to Excel for analysis.

The team also wanted to collect "stop/no stop" counts of visitors, meaning of the visitors observed in a given time period, how many stopped to engage with the timeline and how many walked by it without engaging.

OBSERVATIONS IN THE GALLERY
USING TRACKNTIME™

FINDINGS & DATA ANALYSIS

ENGAGEMENT/DWELL TIME STUDY

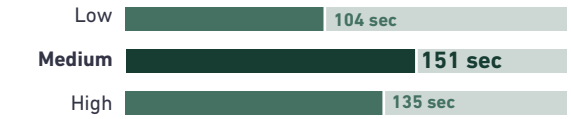
Entrance Timeline 229 seconds

42 visitors were observed and timed over the course of 3 hours of observation. Of those 42 observed, the average time spent was 130 seconds. Therefore, on average, visitors stayed for 57% of the full length of the experience (229 seconds total).

Average watch time (n=42)

130 seconds (57% of video)

Crowd Level



Group Type

Cixi Timeline 201 seconds

44 visitors were observed and timed over the course of 3 hours of observation. Of those 44 observed, the average time spent was 95 seconds. Therefore, on average, visitors stayed for 47% of the full length of the experience (201 seconds total).

Average watch time (n=44)

95 seconds (47% of video)

Crowd Level

Group Type

Visitors spent more time with the timeline at the Entry Timeline at the beginning of the exhibition than they did with the Cixi timeline toward the end of the exhibition.

For both timelines, "couples" (visitors in groups of two), spent more time engaging than those who were visiting alone or in larger groups.

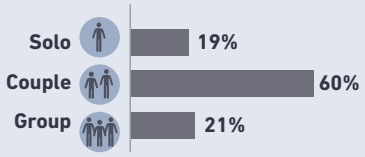
Crowd level impacted dwell time, with medium crowd levels (representing 5-10 visitors in gallery) having the highest length of engagement. There can be a presumption that often low crowd levels encourage the most engagement, but in this study, this was not seen to be true.

There were no meaningful relationship between how long a visitor engaged with a timeline and at what point in the video they encountered the timeline (beginning, middle or end of the loop).

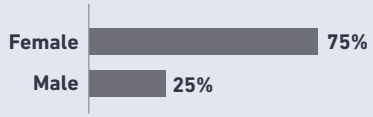
DEMOGRAPHICS FOR THE ENAGEMENT/DWELL TIME STUDY ON PREVIOUS PAGE

42 visitors tracked over 3 hours

Group composition

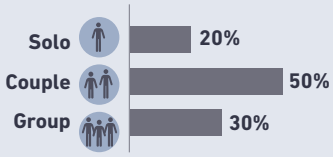


Gender of respondent

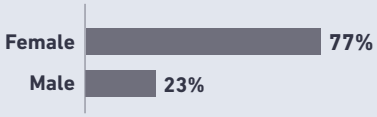


44 visitors tracked over 3 hours

Group composition



Gender of respondent



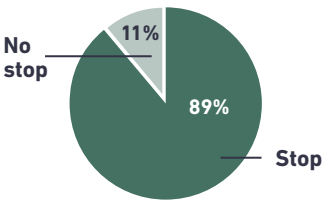
STOP/NO STOP FINDINGS

In the second part of the study, the Evaluation Team observed almost 400 visitors over 6 hours of observation. When strictly tallying "stop" versus "no-stop" over the course of 3 hours, it was observed that 89% of visitors stopped at the entrance timeline, with counts dwindling to 58% who stopped for the final Cixi timeline.

400 VISITORS OBSERVED

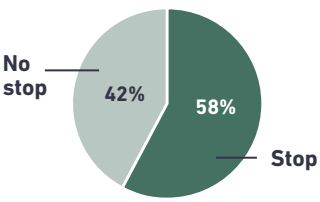
Entrance Timeline 229 seconds

How many people stop to watch

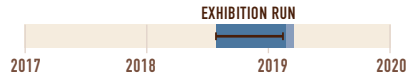


Cixi Timeline 201 seconds

How many people stop to watch



VISITORS' WRITTEN IMPRESSIONS



VISITORS' TAKEAWAYS
RESPONSE STATION

The exhibition included a visitor response station where visitors were invited to add their thoughts, reactions, and drawings to a large community scroll. The depth and breadth of the visitor's contributions help the team understand what visitors took away from their experience as well as how they connected the exhibition to their own lives.

BACKGROUND

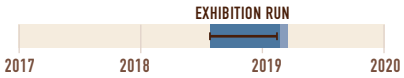
Visitor's contributions help the team understand what they took away from the experience.

One of the goals for the exhibition was for visitors to question the challenges that women in roles of power have faced—and continue to face—around the world. To prompt reflection about these issues, the Exhibition Team designed a visitor response station at the end of the exhibition and developed two sets of questions which rotated halfway through the run of the exhibition:

- **What do you feel are the challenges that women in power face today? How do you deal with those challenges?**
- **What do you feel are the expectations for women in power today? How do you think women in power are portrayed today?**

Below the questions, the Exhibition Team created a paper scroll interactive on which visitors could write or draw responses. There was a notable surge of responses when women's issues were in the news, such as the #metoo movement, the Kavanaugh Supreme Court nominee trials, and the midterm Congressional elections.

VISITOR TAKEAWAYS



Looking at about 10 feet of visitor responses, the team discussed the major themes they saw emerging from the contributions, and culled these themes down to four categories they were most interested in exploring further.

DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

Six scrolls of paper, or over **700 feet of visitor scroll responses**, were collected over the course of the exhibition's run. Visitors contributed to the scrolls with comments, ideas, memories, and drawings. Contributions were in multiple languages including Chinese, Spanish, and Polish. Oftentimes, visitors would add to other comments in dialogue with other visitors, drawing lines of connection or refuting someone else's statement.

Using a small segment of the overall scroll responses, the Evaluation Team facilitated a "codebook" making workshop with the ExhibitionTeam, categorizing the responses into four themes that were then documented, described, and assigned a color. The codebook served as a color-coded key and guide to mark comments on the scrolls with a specific color sticker. The result was a highly visual way of seeing the quantity and frequency of certain comments.

THEMES THAT THE TEAM WAS INTERESTED IN EXPLORING

Exhibition related

Refers to a specific art object, symbol, empress, or idea from the exhibition. Notes a specific takeaway from the exhibition.

Answers prompt

Directly responds to one of the questions posed at the exit.

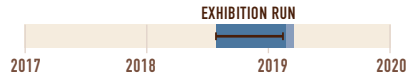
Current events

References politics, political figures, news events, and/or popular culture.

Women & power

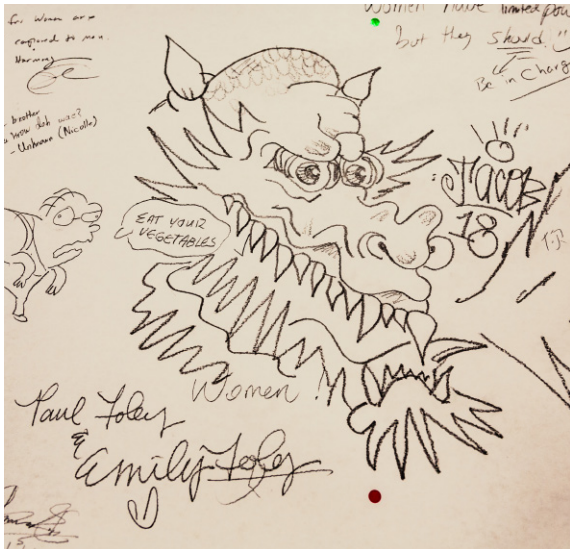
Generally references women and power, not related to the exhibition.

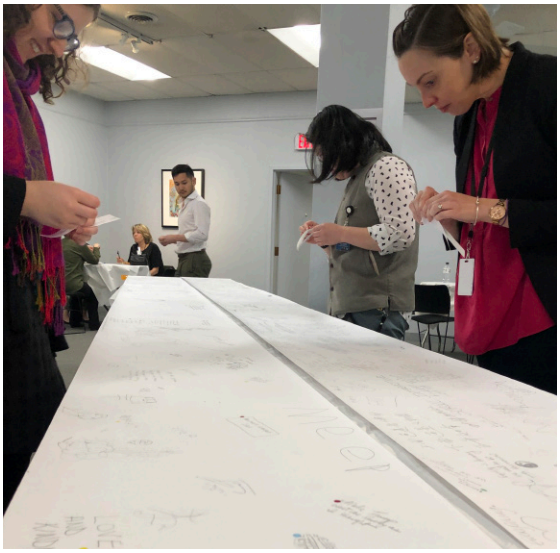
VISITOR TAKEAWAYS



EVALUATION CAPACITY BUILDING

In April 2019, the Evaluation Team hosted a special staff event, "The Empresses Scroll Unroll", in order to open to expand evaluation capacity building beyond just the Exhibition Team to the entire PEM museum staff. All staff were invited to stop by and try their hand at coding the scroll responses with color coded dot stickers, and help to make meaning of the large collection of visitor responses together. The event was a great success, with over 50 staff members in attendance, including three Chinese translators. Together, with the crowdsourced help of their museum colleagues, the Evaluation Team was able to read and code over 3,500 responses (2 football fields of scroll paper!) in just over four hours.





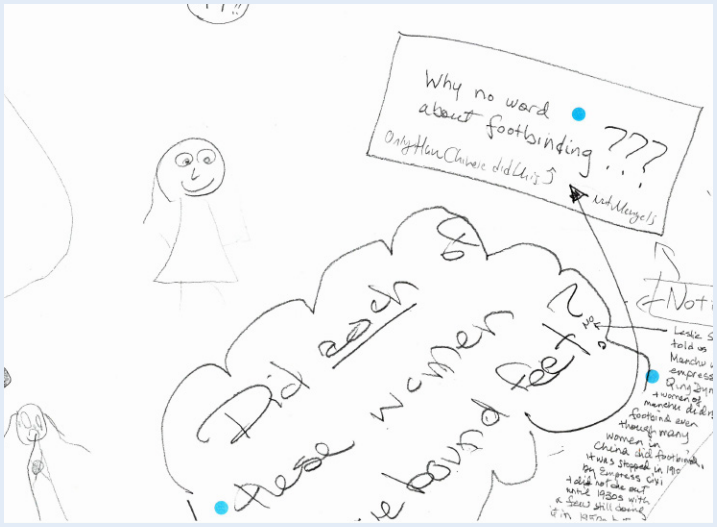
"It was really interesting to see how people tied current events into the main themes of the exhibition, and responded to each other as if the scroll were a giant social media thread. I learned a lot about what sticks with our audience and will keep this in mind for tours and interpretation of the next China-related exhibitions."

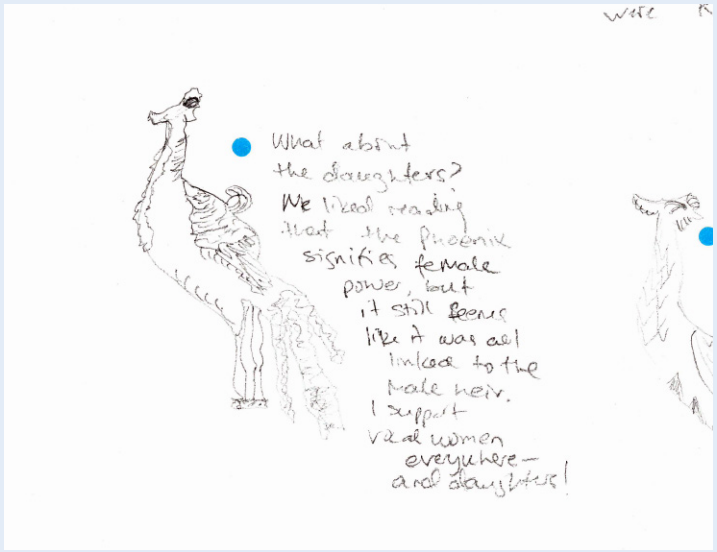
–Stephanie Tung,
Associate Curator

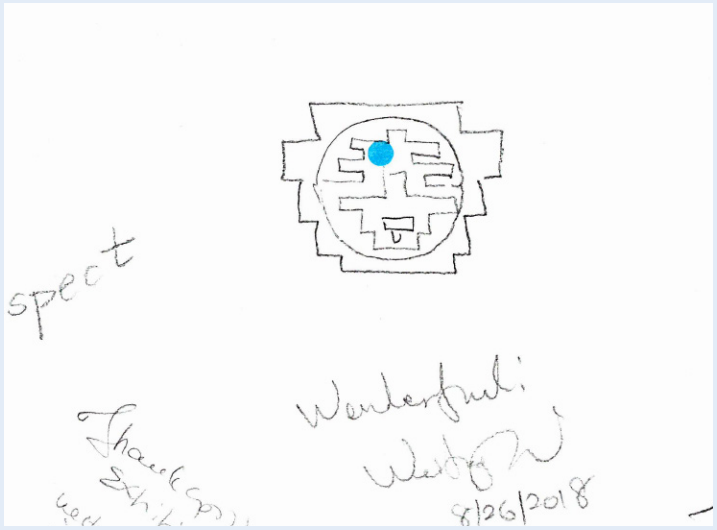
VISITOR TAKEAWAYS

EXHIBITION RUN
2017 2018 2019 2020

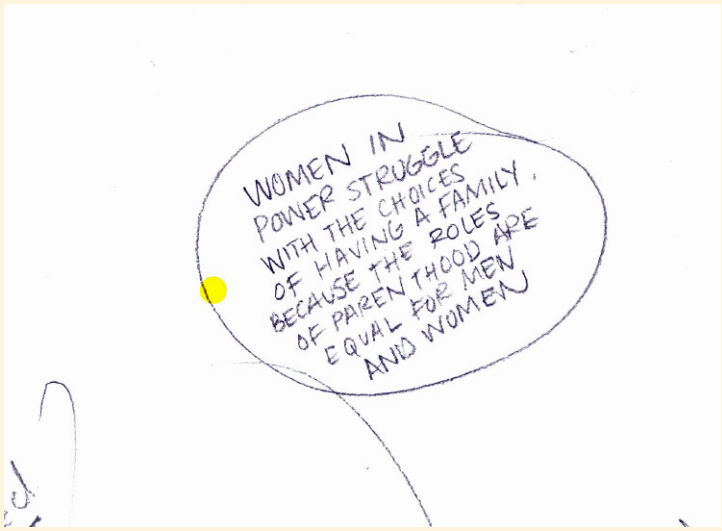
Exhibition related responses

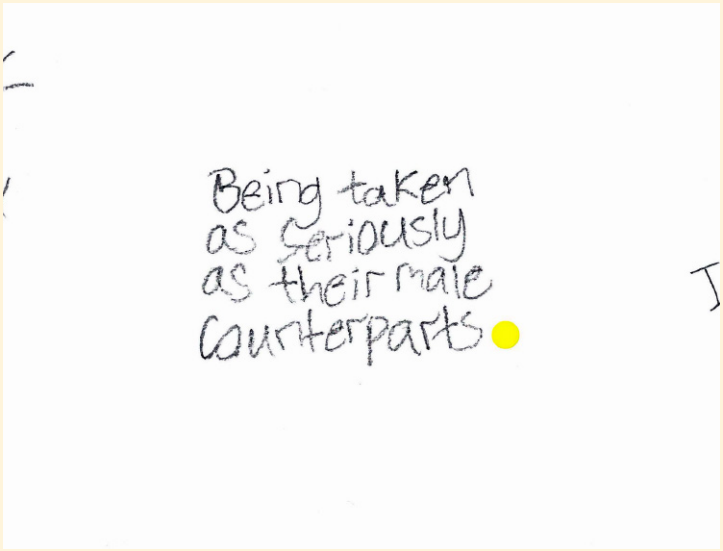


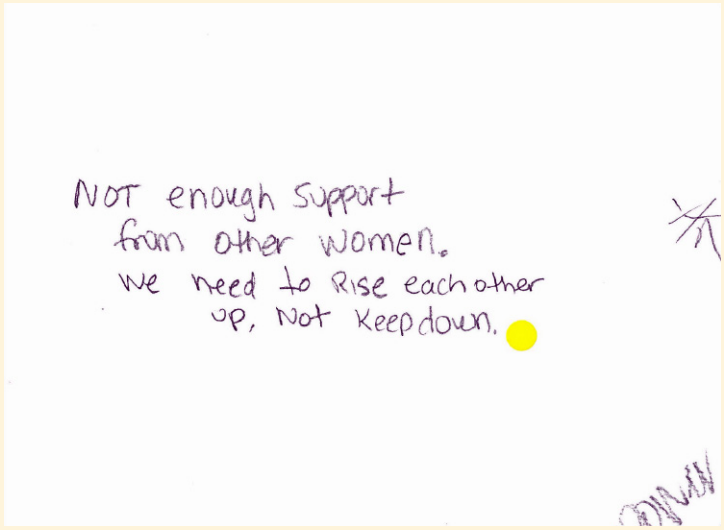

What about the daughters? We heard reading that the Phoenix signifies female power, but it still seems like it was all linked to the male heir. I support real women everywhere— and daughters!



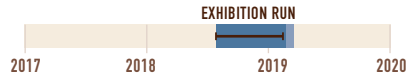
Answer Prompt



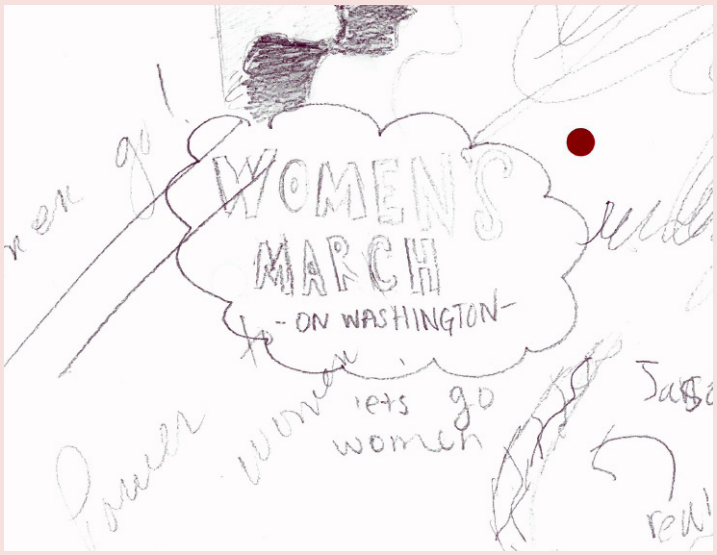


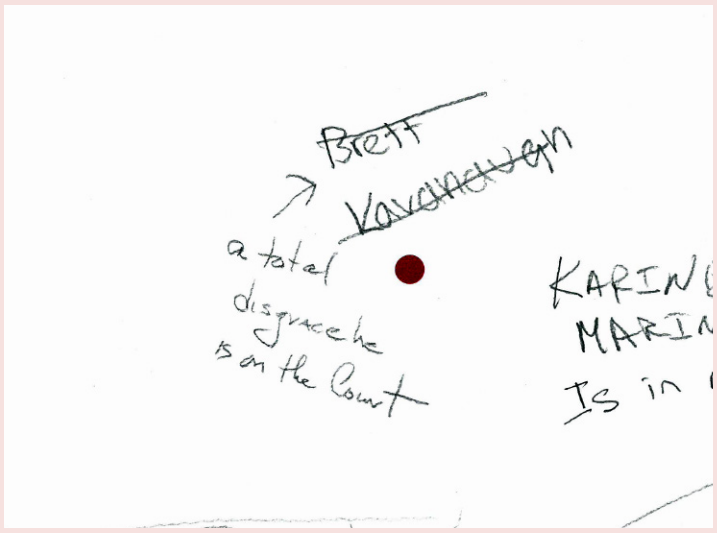


VISITOR TAKEAWAYS

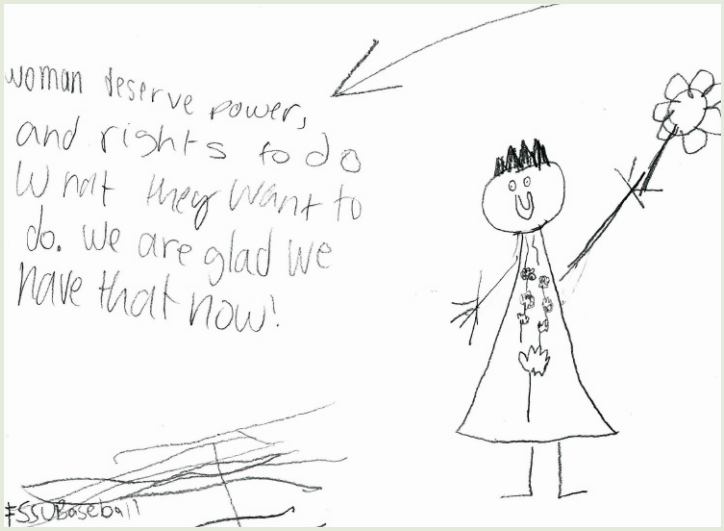


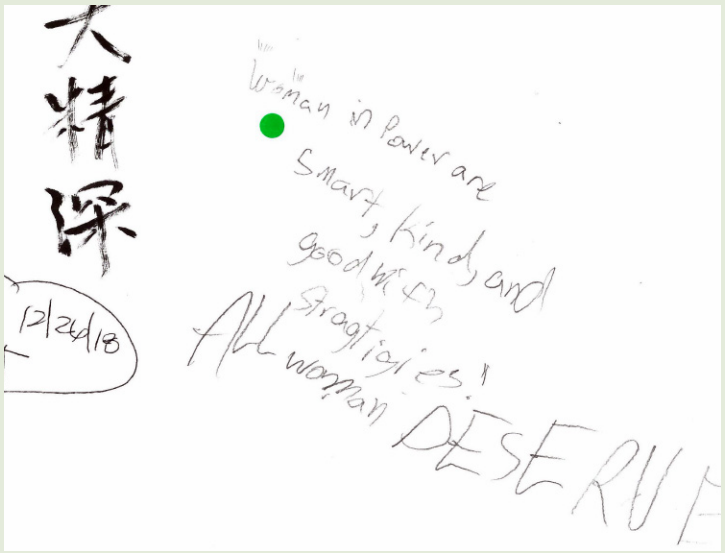
Current events

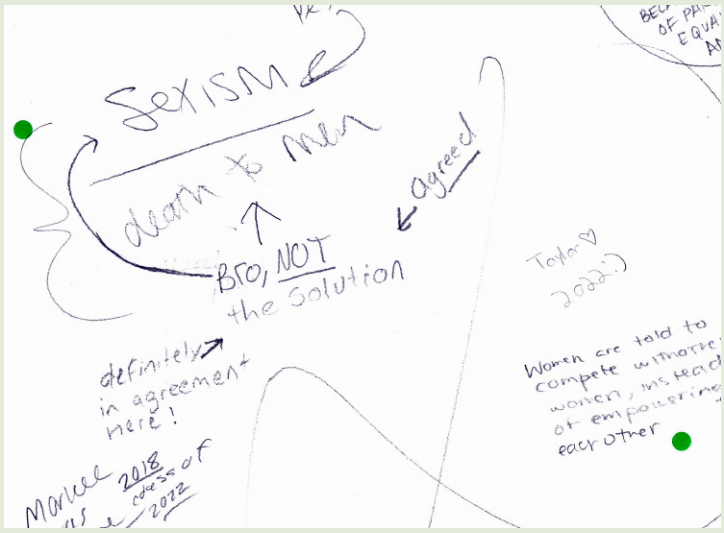




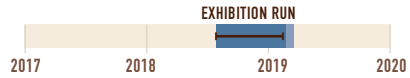
Women and power





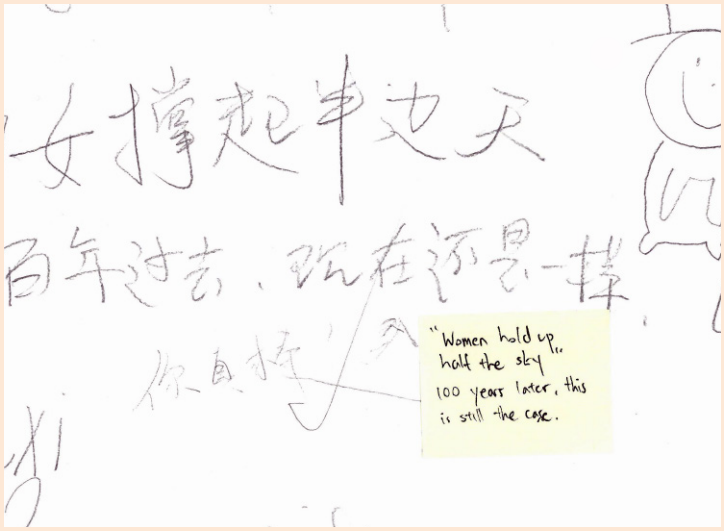

sexism
down to men
agreed
BRO, NOT the solution
definitely in agreement here!
Women are told to compete with other women, instead of empowering each other

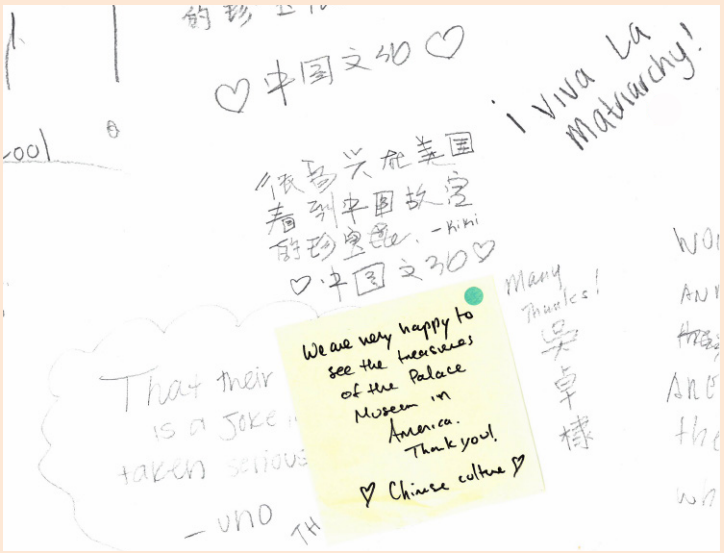
VISITOR TAKEAWAYS

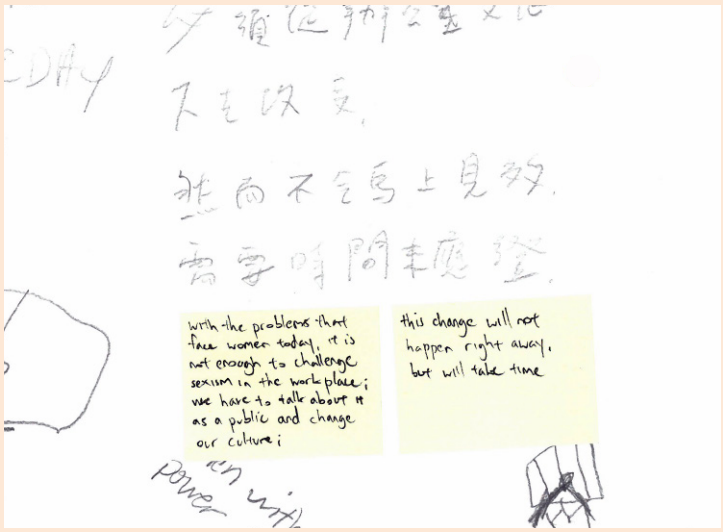


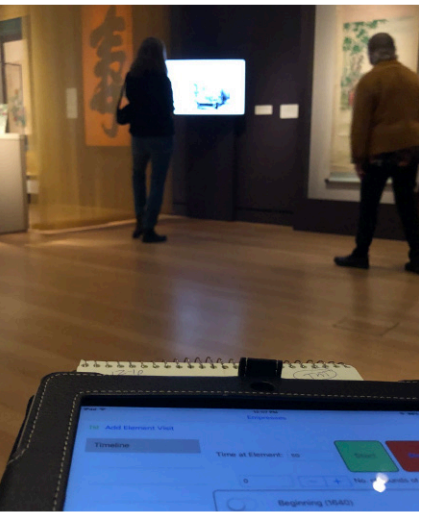
Drawings

Chinese Translations






with the problems that face women today, it is not enough to challenge sexism in the work place; we have to talk about it as a public and change our culture;
this change will not happen right away, but will take time



CONCLUSION

The *Empresses of China's Forbidden City* exhibition provided a unique opportunity for PEM to thoughtfully integrate evaluation and visitor research into our overall process.

While the Personal Meaning Maps collected at the beginning of the process helped our team to understand preconceptions and misconceptions that our visitors were bringing to the topic, the visitor exit surveys and gallery observations gave us feedback during the exhibition's run on visitor behavior, satisfaction, and outcomes. Finally, taking a deeper look at the visitor responses collected throughout the run of the exhibition at the scroll response station provided us a glimpse at how visitors were processing and reflecting on the objects they saw and the stories they read; and most importantly how they were making connections to their own lives.

The most exciting aspect of incorporating evaluation into PEM's work on this project was the inclusion of *all* members of the team in the process. From designers to integrated media specialists to curators, the entire Exhibition Team **participated in taking the time to look, listen, and reflect on feedback and insights from our visitors**. This project has helped exhibition teams understand how deeply beneficial and rewarding it is for all team members to make time for this thoughtful, intentional, and reflective practice—and most importantly, to use data and insights gleaned from this process to inform future exhibition development.